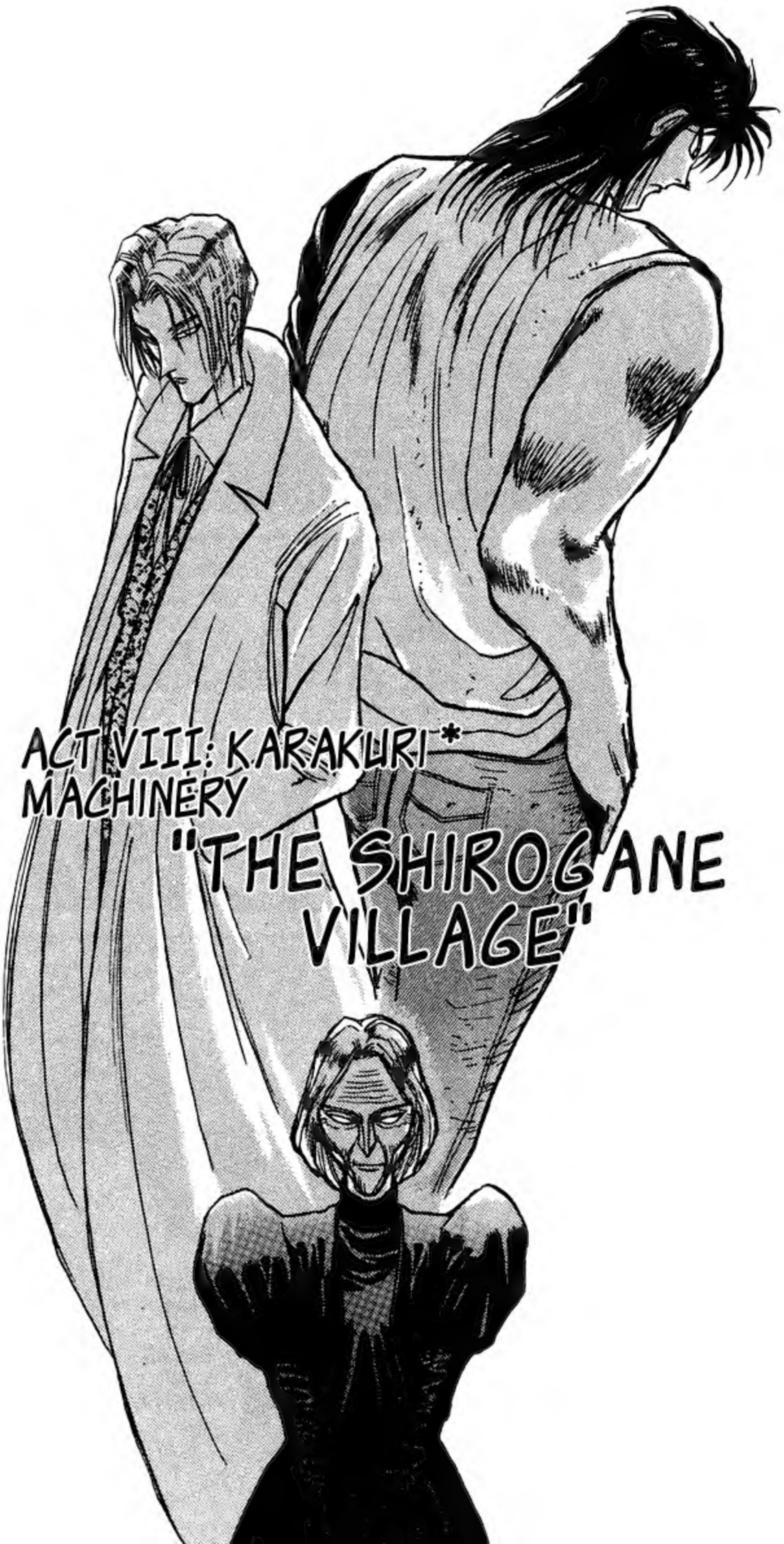
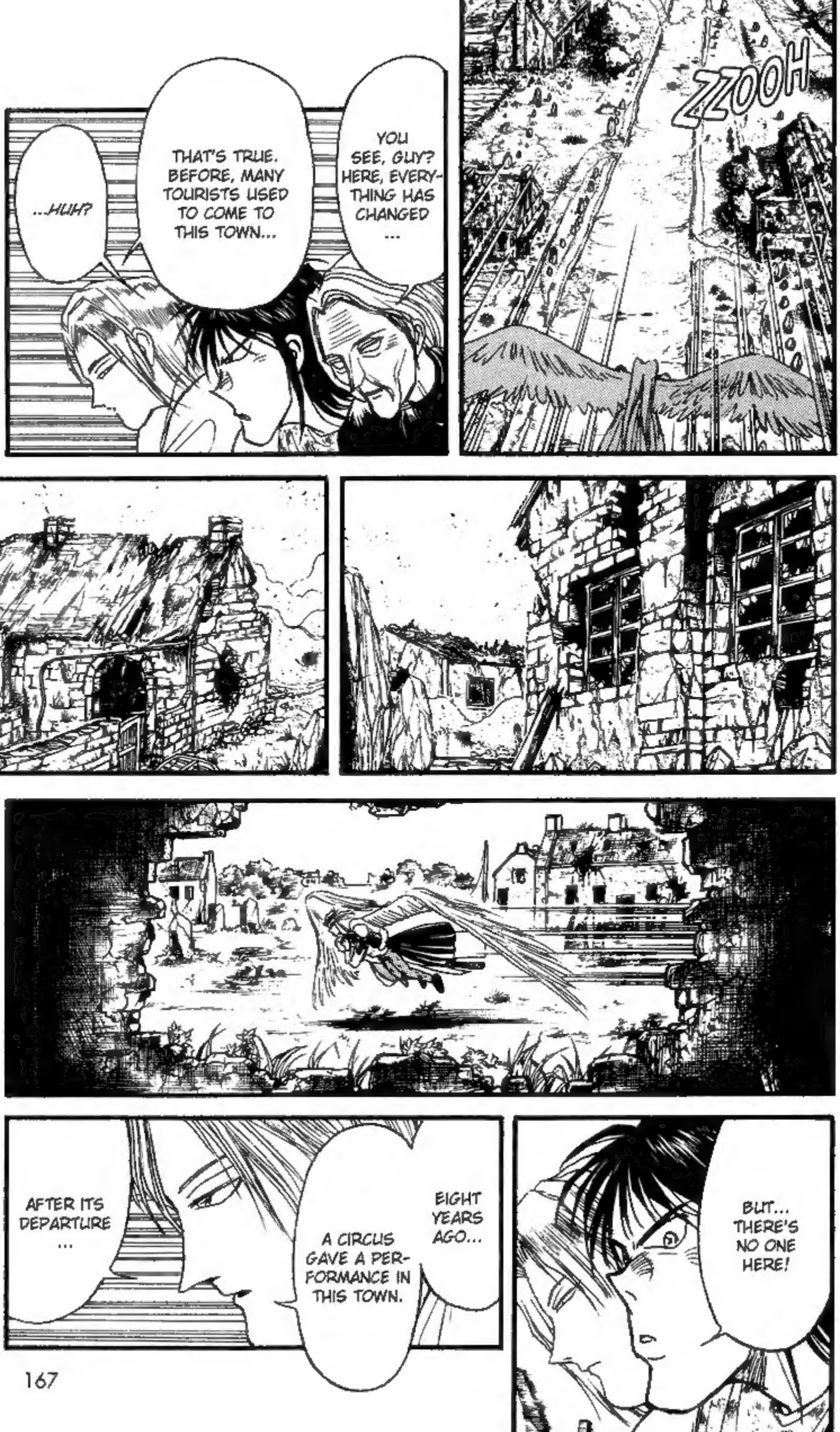
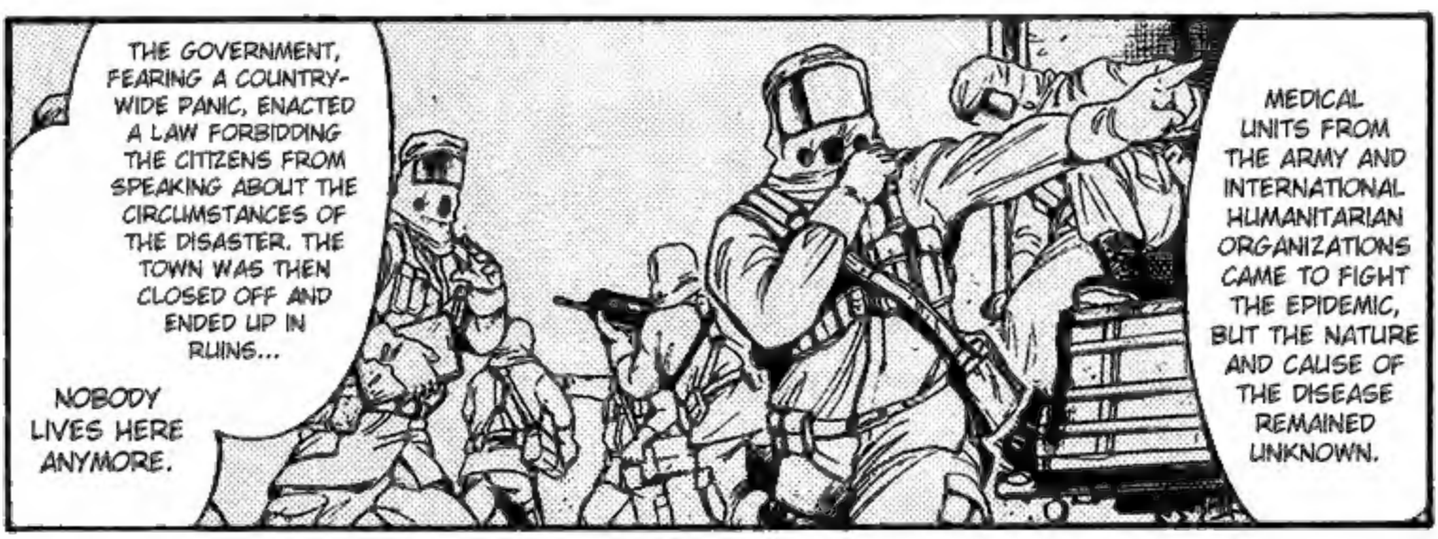


# ACT VIII: KARAKURI* MACHINERY "THE SHIROGANE VILLAGE"

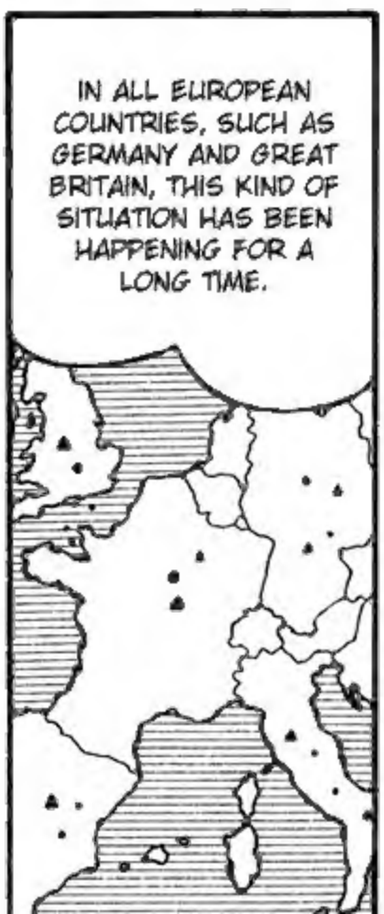
VVHHH
FLAP
WHERE ARE WE HEADED?
GUY, THERE IS SOMETHING I'D LIKE TO SHOW NARUMI.
COULD WE GO THROUGH QUIBERON, PLEASE?
NO PROBLEM.
ZOOHH


...HUH?
THAT'S TRUE. BEFORE, MANY TOURISTS USED TO COME TO THIS TOWN...
YOU SEE, GUY? HERE, EVERY-THING HAS CHANGED ...
ZOOH
AFTER ITS DEPARTURE ...
A CIRCUS GAVE A PER-FORMANCE IN THIS TOWN.
EIGHT YEARS AGO...
BUT... THERE'S NO ONE HERE!

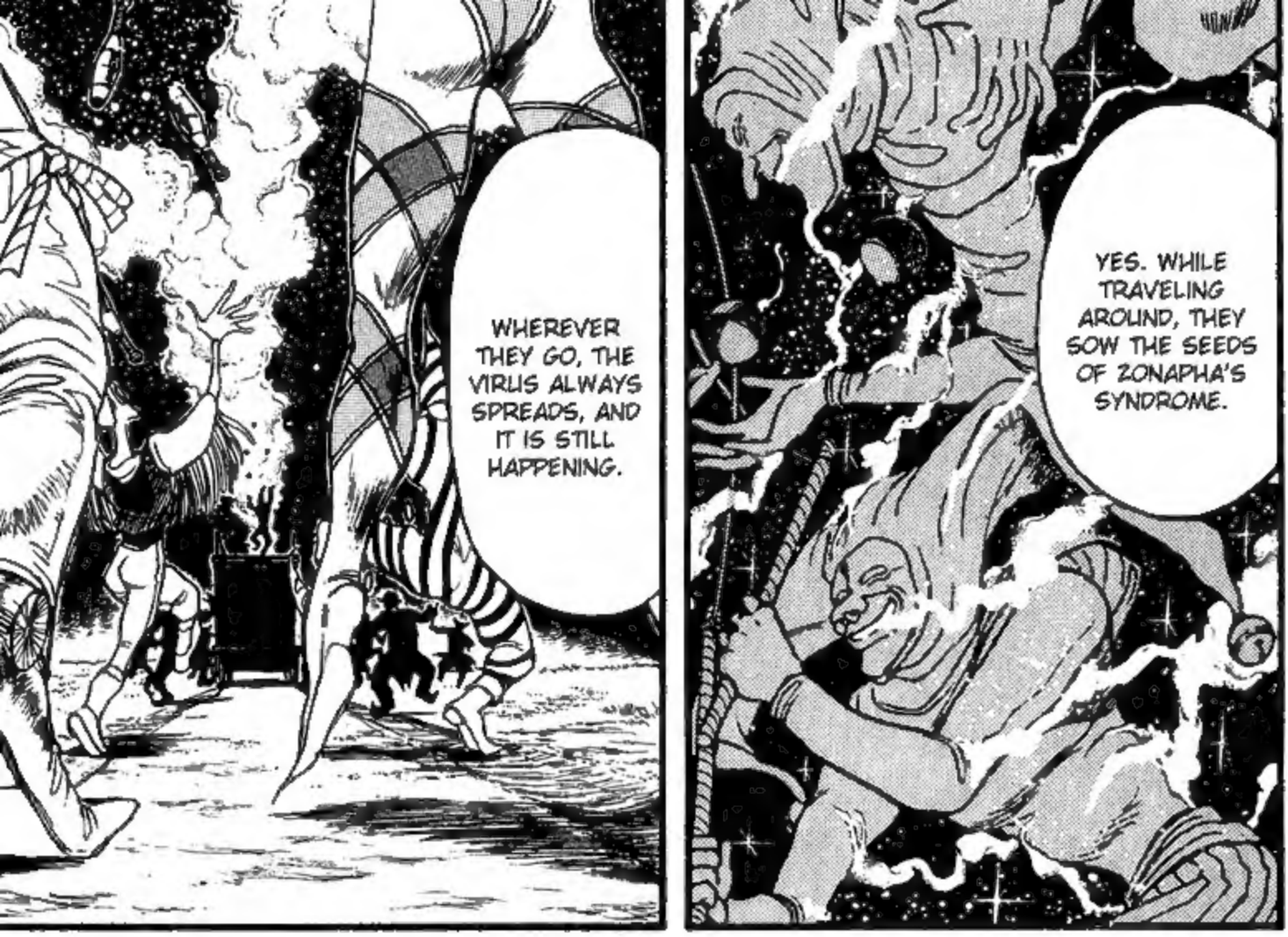
WHAT?! ZONAPHA'S SYNDROME ?!
THE WHOLE TOWN WAS AFFLICTED BY ZONAPHA'S SYNDROME.

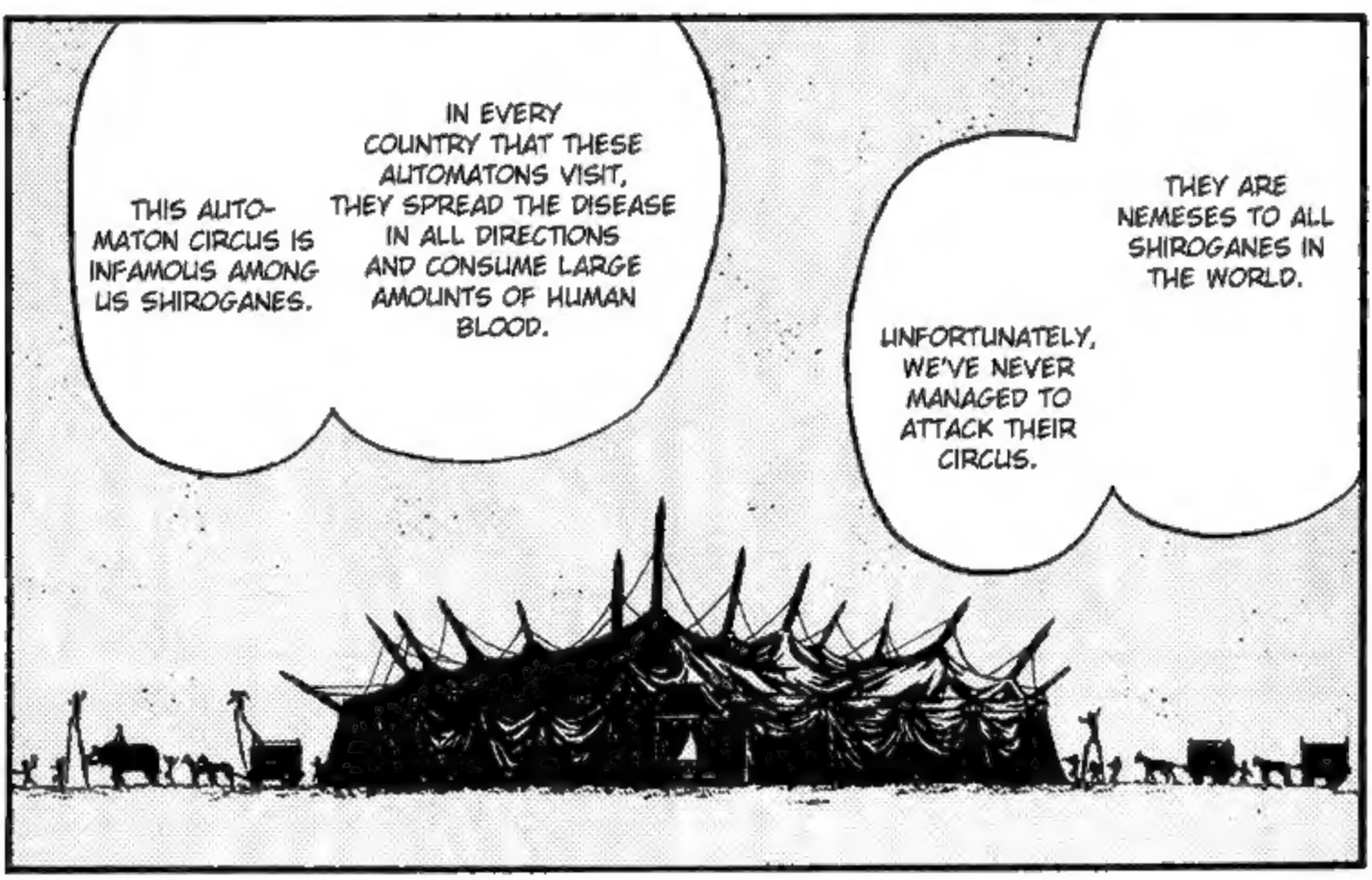

THE GOVERNMENT, FEARING A COUNTRY-WIDE PANIC, ENACTED A LAW FORBIDDING THE CITIZENS FROM SPEAKING ABOUT THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF THE DISASTER. THE TOWN WAS THEN CLOSED OFF AND ENDED UP IN RUINS...
NOBODY LIVES HERE ANYMORE.
MEDICAL UNITS FROM THE ARMY AND INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN ORGANIZATIONS CAME TO FIGHT THE EPIDEMIC, BUT THE NATURE AND CAUSE OF THE DISEASE REMAINED UNKNOWN.

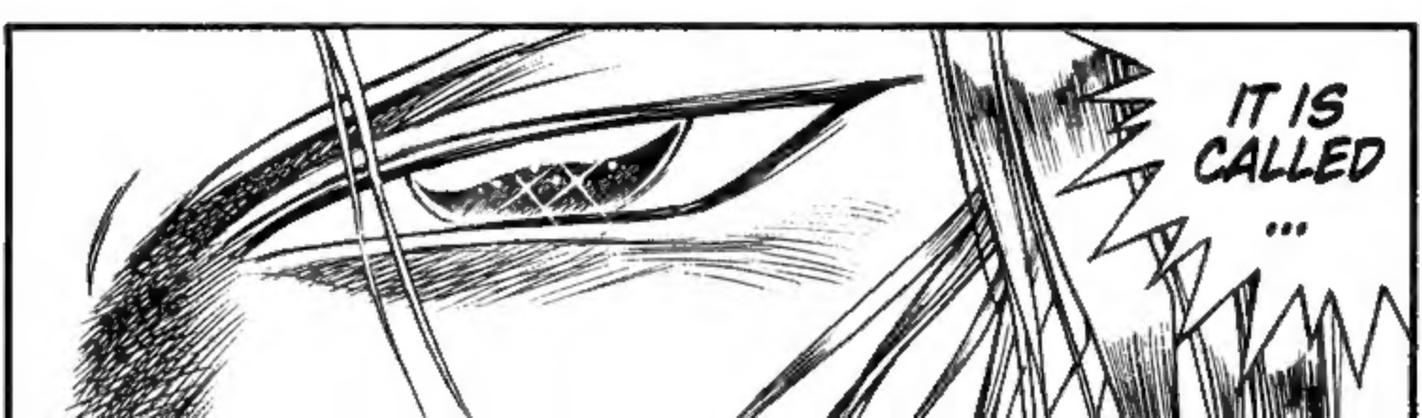
AND... YOU'RE SAYING THAT THE MEMBERS OF THAT CIRCUS...
...ARE ALL AUTO-MATONS ???


IN ALL EUROPEAN COUNTRIES, SUCH AS GERMANY AND GREAT BRITAIN, THIS KIND OF SITUATION HAS BEEN HAPPENING FOR A LONG TIME.

ALL OF THAT HAPPENED... BECAUSE OF THAT CIRCUS?
NARUMI... THIS KIND OF DISASTER HAS HAPPENED OUTSIDE OF FRANCE, TOO.


WHEREVER THEY GO, THE VIRUS ALWAYS SPREADS, AND IT IS STILL HAPPENING.
YES. WHILE TRAVELING AROUND, THEY SOW THE SEEDS OF ZONAPHA'S SYNDROME.


THIS AUTO-MATON CIRCUS IS INFAMOUS AMONG US SHIROGANES.
IN EVERY COUNTRY THAT THESE AUTOMATONS VISIT, THEY SPREAD THE DISEASE IN ALL DIRECTIONS AND CONSUME LARGE AMOUNTS OF HUMAN BLOOD.
THEY ARE NEMESES TO ALL SHIROGANES IN THE WORLD.
UNFORTUNATELY, WE'VE NEVER MANAGED TO ATTACK THEIR CIRCUS.


IT IS CALLED ...

THE MIDNIGHT CIRCUS!

THE MIDNIGHT... CIRCUS...
VVOOHH

SCH
LA
CLLC
FLAVIO-HAS-BEEN-DE-STROYED
A-NEW-SHIRO-GANE-A-BIG-MAN

CLLC
CLLC
CLLC

A-BIG-SHIRO-GANE
A-BIG-SHIRO-GANE

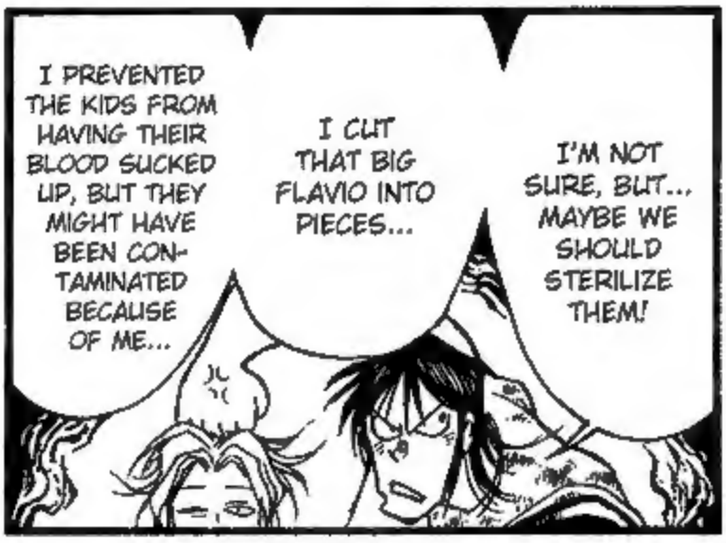
VVHHH

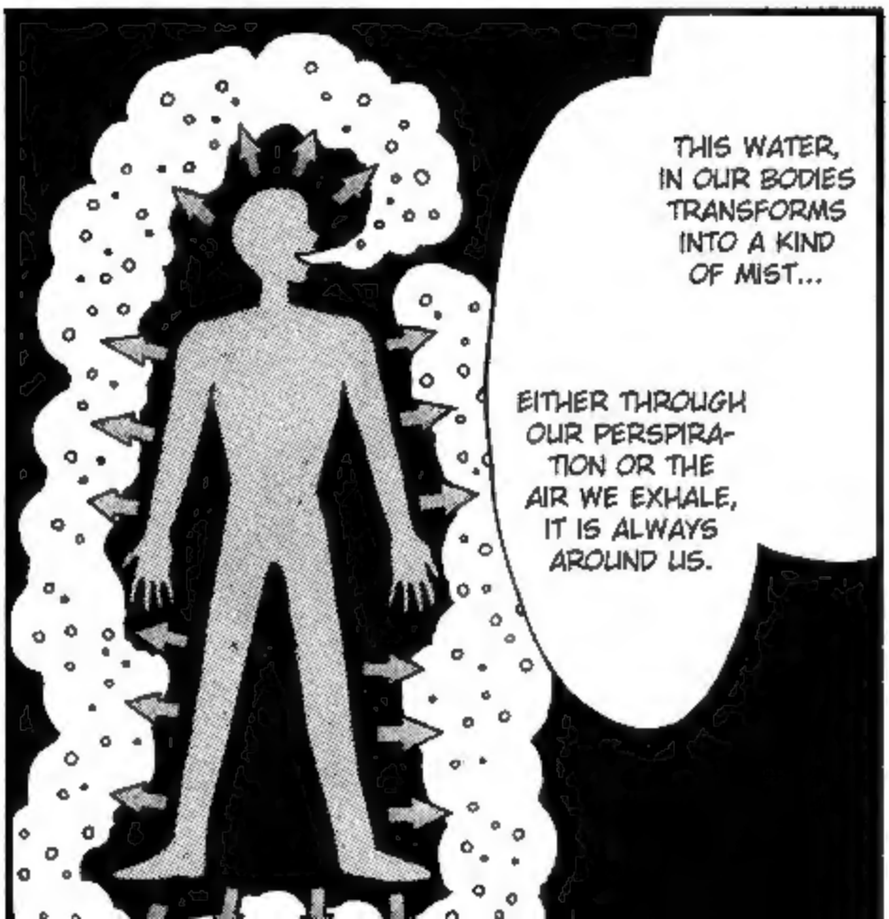
HA HA HA! YOU OBVIOUSLY HAVE A BRAIN ABOVE YOUR EYES, BUT IT'S OF NO USE TO YOU.
SAY, GUY, I WANNA ASK YOU SOME-THING.

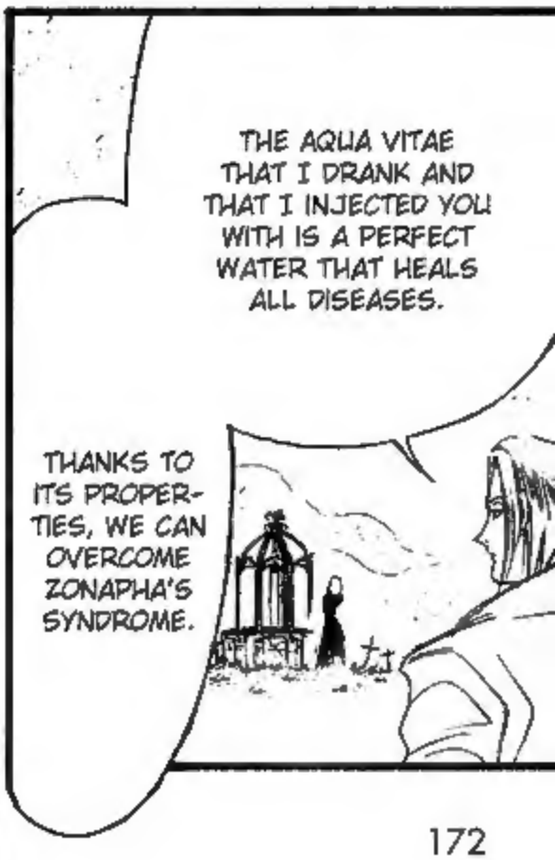
VOOH

THIS VISCOUS LIQUID THAT LOOKS LIKE MERCURY...
THIS AUTOMATON'S VITAL FLUID, IT'S THE CAUSE OF ZONAPHA'S SYNDROME, RIGHT?
SO, MAYBE DESTROYING THE AUTOMATONS ISN'T ENOUGH...
LOING
LOING
HEUH
HEUH

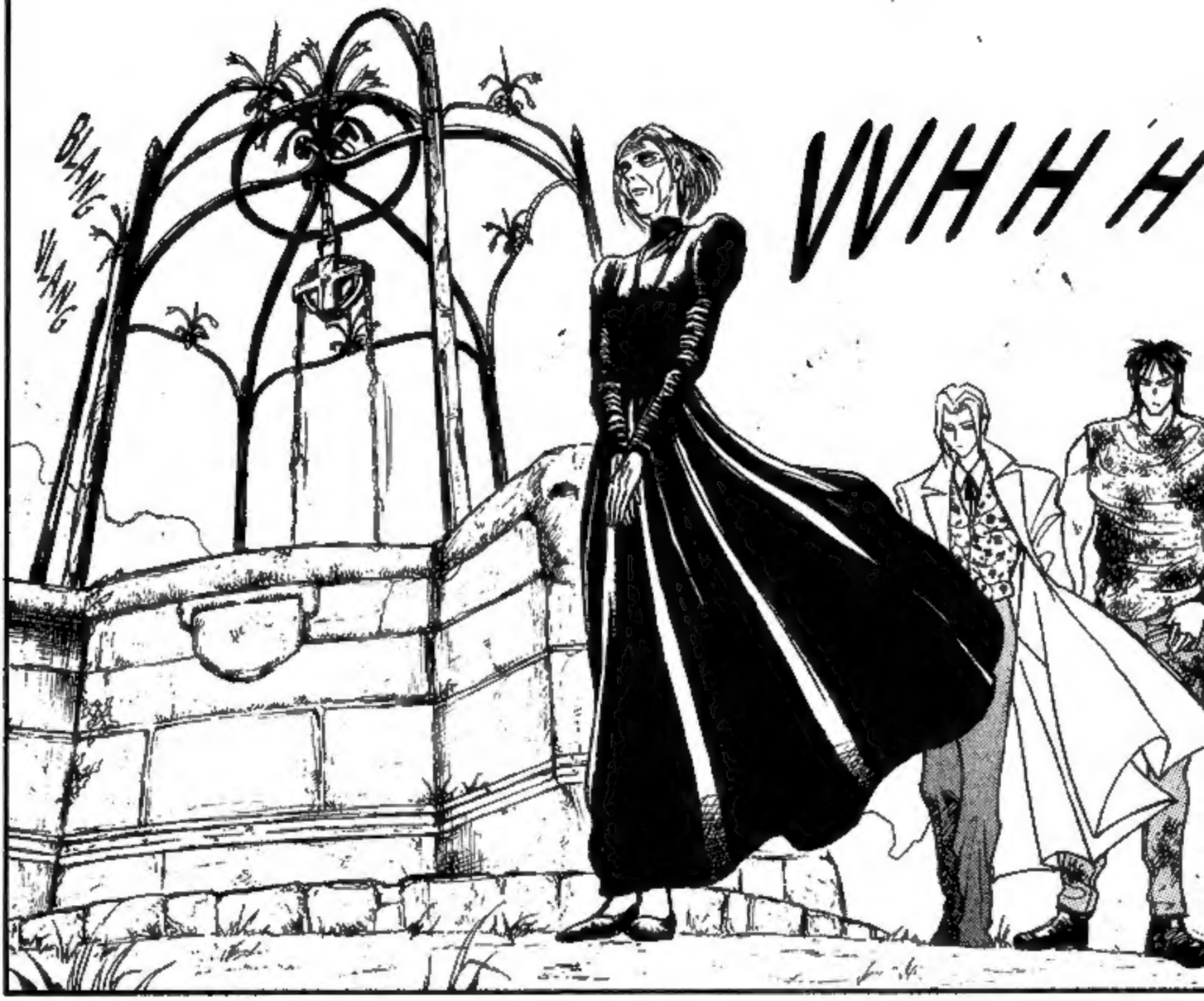
THAT'S GOOD, NARUMI! YOU'RE ASKING THE RIGHT QUESTIONS!
SAH...


I PREVENTED THE KIDS FROM HAVING THEIR BLOOD SUCKED UP, BUT THEY MIGHT HAVE BEEN CONTAMINATED BECAUSE OF ME...
I CUT THAT BIG FLAVIO INTO PIECES...
I'M NOT SURE, BUT... MAYBE WE SHOULD STERILIZE THEM!


THIS WATER, IN OUR BODIES TRANSFORMS INTO A KIND OF MIST...
EITHER THROUGH OUR PERSPIRATION OR THE AIR WE EXHALE, IT IS ALWAYS AROUND US.


THE AQUA VITAE THAT I DRANK AND THAT I INJECTED YOU WITH IS A PERFECT WATER THAT HEALS ALL DISEASES.
THANKS TO ITS PROPERTIES, WE CAN OVERCOME ZONAPHA'S SYNDROME.

...THE AQUA VITAE THAT PROTECTS OUR BODY BY FORMING THIS "BARRIER"...
...COMPLETELY CANCELS THE EFFECTS OF ZONAPHA'S SYNDROME THAT THE AUTOMATONS SPREAD!
THIS MIST IS THE REASON WE HAVE TO FIGHT AGAINST ALL AUTOMATONS.
HM... AND THEN?
THINK ABOUT IT! IN FACT, THIS MEANS THAT...
?
...HOW HEAVY THE RESPONSI-BILITY OF THE SHIROGANES, CARRIERS OF THE AQUA VITAE, IS!
SO YOU UNDER-STAND, NARUMI...
SOME FANCY STUFF, THIS AQUA VITAE...
THIS IMPLIES THAT FIGHTING UP CLOSE AND PERSONAL AGAINST THE AUTOMATONS SLOWLY BUT STEADILY NEUTRALIZES THE SYNDROME'S VIRUS!
HOOO! I UNDER-STAND NOW...
GRRR
RRR
STOP IT ALREADY WITH YOUR MOMMY!!!
...ALAS! DID YOU SEE, MOMMY?! I USED THIS PRECIOUS WATER FOR THIS IMBECILE!


BLANG
VLANG
VHHH

...AND I, I AM FINALLY ALONE.
NOW... MARY AND TANIA ARE GONE...

CRAC

THE AQUA VITAE THAT LONG AGO FILLED THIS WELL...
...HAS COMPLETELY DISAPPEARED. THERE IS NOT A DROP LEFT.
BRLOM
THEN, WE VISITED OTHER PEOPLE WHO HAD BEEN AFFLICTED BY ZONAPHA'S SYNDROME AND TRANSFORMED THEM INTO SHIROGANES.
TANIA, MARY AND I COLLECTED THE AQUA VITAE FROM THIS WELL.
CLANG
CLANG
YES... IN ORDER TO COUNTER THE PLANS OF THE AUTOMATONS, WHO CONTINUALLY INCREASE THEIR NUMBERS.
IT WAS USED TO CREATE MANY SHIROGANES, MYSELF INCLUDED.
EH?! HE DIDN'T EVEN ASK ME!
YES...
GUY... MARY ASKED YOU THAT QUESTION, DID SHE NOT?
WE ALWAYS GAVE THEM A CHOICE... BY ASKING IF THEY'D RATHER DIE, OR IF THEY'D RATHER LIVE WHILE CONSUMED BY HATRED FOR THE AUTOMATONS.
BUT WE NEVER FORCED THEM TO DRINK IT...

THAT CHOICE, I WAS ALSO ASKED TO MAKE IT...
...MORE THAN 200 YEARS AGO...

VVVHHHH-

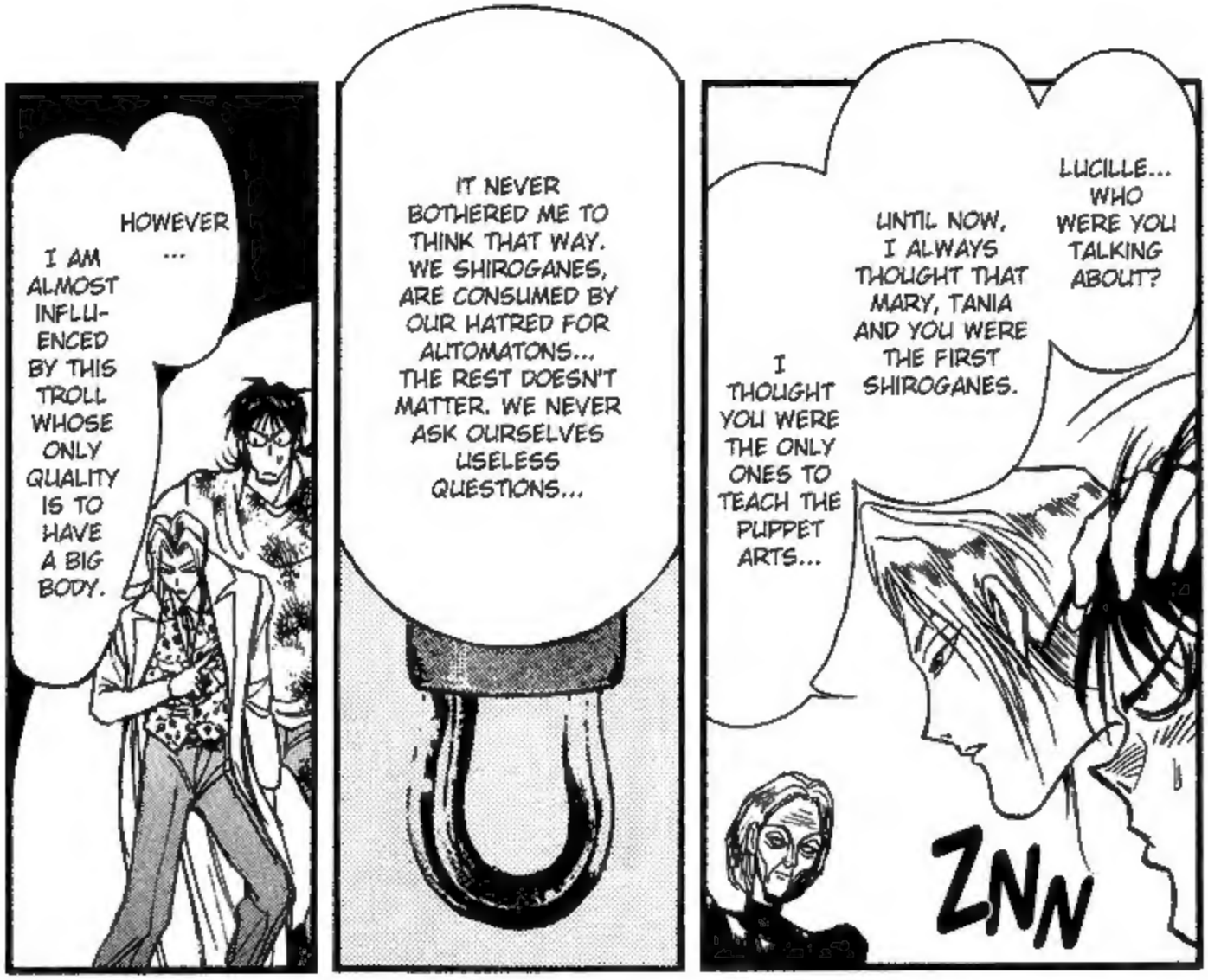
"DO YOU WANT TO LIVE"...
"... OR..."

THAT IS WHAT "HE" ASKED ME...

YOU'RE GONNA TELL ME EXACTLY WHAT HAPPENED!
OK, NOW I'VE HAD IT!!!
HOH

HM... NO...
YOU BROUGHT ME HERE TO EXPLAIN THIS TO ME... AM I WRONG?!

TELL ME CLEARLY HOW ALL OF THIS HAPPENED!
ALL THOSE WEIRD AUTOMATONS... AND YOU SHIROGANES WHO SPEND YOUR TIME MANIPULATING OTHERS... YOU DIDN'T JUST RANDOMLY APPEAR, DID YOU?!


HOWEVER ...
I AM ALMOST INFLU-ENCED BY THIS TROLL WHOSE ONLY QUALITY IS TO HAVE A BIG BODY.
IT NEVER BOTHERED ME TO THINK THAT WAY. WE SHIROGANES, ARE CONSUMED BY OUR HATRED FOR AUTOMATONS... THE REST DOESN'T MATTER. WE NEVER ASK OURSELVES USELESS QUESTIONS...
I THOUGHT YOU WERE THE ONLY ONES TO TEACH THE PUPPET ARTS...
UNTIL NOW, I ALWAYS THOUGHT THAT MARY, TANIA AND YOU WERE THE FIRST SHIROGANES.
LUCILLE... WHO WERE YOU TALKING ABOUT?
ZNN

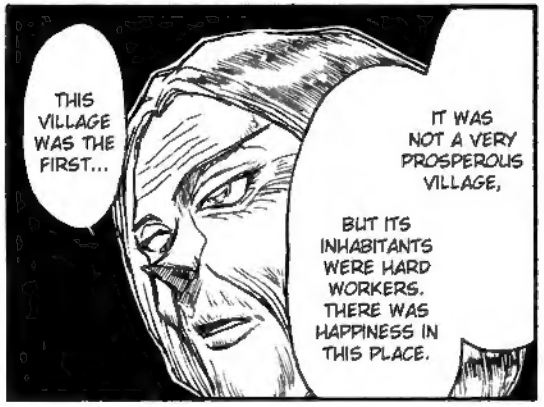
WHY DO SHIROGANES HATE AUTOMATONS SO MUCH? WHY DO THEY SACRIFICE EVERYTHING TO DESTROY THEM?!
TELL US HOW THIS ALL STARTED, LUCILLE...
I, TOO, WOULD LIKE TO KNOW MORE.

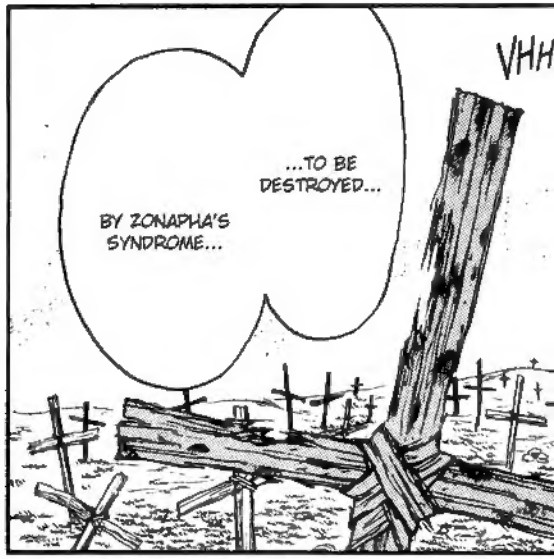
...EVERY PART OF THIS STORY ALWAYS BRINGS US BACK TO THE AQUA VITAE?
AND ALSO, TELL US WHY...

OVER THERE...
THERE WAS A CHURCH.
UHM...
DO YOU MEAN THAT...
IT WAS A VERY SMALL CHURCH.
BEHIND THE HILL, ON THAT SIDE.
...STOOD OUR VILLAGE.
YES.
HERE, 200 YEARS AGO...

...RIGHT AFTER THE MIDNIGHT CIRCUS CAME THROUGH.
GOOOHAH

THE VILLAGE OF KER'LOIC ...


THIS VILLAGE WAS THE FIRST...
IT WAS NOT A VERY PROSPEROUS VILLAGE,
BUT ITS INHABITANTS WERE HARD WORKERS. THERE WAS HAPPINESS IN THIS PLACE.


VHH
...TO BE DESTROYED...
BY ZONAPHA'S SYNDROME...

KARAKURI CIRCUS / END OF VOLUME 8